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ON TAP

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DISTRICT SANITATION SYSTEM

Many customers may not realize that TCWD serves as a sanitation agency as well as the local water purveyor. In some instances throughout the County, the charge of sewage collection and disposal is the responsibility of an individual agency dedicated solely to that specific purpose. TCWD has a sanitary sewer system which is designed for the collection of sewage. It is called a “sanitary sewer” system because it is a closed system (no stormwater). An added benefit to the sanitation system is that once the sewage is collected and after the treatment process is completed, TCWD can provide recycled water for the purpose of irrigation through the subsequent treatment of the sewage, which decreases the overall demand for potable water.

In TCWD’s service area, there are three key dynamics at work concerning sewage handling and disposal. Customers on the upper Plano are tied into a sanitary sewer system. This allows all of their sewage to be collected and delivered to the Robinson Ranch Wastewater Treatment Plant via sewer lift stations, which are strategically located throughout the various communities. The sewage undergoes the various treatment processes in order to meet Title 22 regulations for use as recycled water. TCWD recycles 100% of the sewage delivered to the Robinson Ranch Wastewater Treatment Plant.

There are some customers in the Canyon areas that are not connected to the sanitary sewer system. In these cases, the customers are completely reliant on septic systems installed at their respective residence. Septic systems represent approximately eight percent of the total amount of District customers. Ultimately, these residents are responsible for the handling and disposal of the sewage collected in their septic tanks.

Finally, on the far North-Western end of the District’s service area near Santiago Canyon Road there are some customers, roughly sixteen percent of the total customer base, which are connected to another sanitary sewer system. The sewage from these communities collects at TCWD’s El Toro Lift Station (ETLS), near El Toro Road and Portola Parkway. The sewage at this lift station takes a totally different path than the ones discussed previously. TCWD shares ownership responsibility of this station with Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) and Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD). As a result of various agreements held by the three agencies, the sewage collected at this station can be delivered to two different facilities that are operated by SMWD (the Chiquita Water Treatment Plant near Ortega Highway) and IRWD (the Los Alisos Water Recycling Plant in Lake Forest).

TCWD’s Sewer Flat Rate Charge is applied to those customers who are connected to a sanitary sewer system. Customers who have septic systems are not assessed a Sewer Rate. TCWD’s Sewer Flat Rate has been at the same level for approximately twenty years. Unfortunately, recent developments at the State management level have created concern among Special Districts that treat sewage.

Any Special District that collects and/or treats sewage is subject to the rules and regulations of a Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board). There are a total of nine regional boards statewide and each one is charged with making water quality decisions for its respective region. These decisions include setting standards, issuing waste discharge requirements, determining compliance with established requirements, and any subsequent enforcement actions in the event of requirement violations. TCWD is included in Region Nine, the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB). The Ninth Regional Board is a

blend of portions of San Diego County, Orange County, and Riverside County.

Recently, there has been an increased focus on the enforcement of the Regional Board's regulations. A local example of this trend that demonstrates the severity of its impact occurred in March 2010. Last year, SMWD experienced a serious sewer force main break adjacent to Tijeras Creek, resulting in a spill of approximately 2.3 million gallons. The repair work extended over several days and cost SMWD millions of dollars in part replacement, mechanical repairs, and employee compensation. A single unforeseen occurrence such as this would have a serious impact on any agency, big or small. Multiple violations, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars, in a short amount of time could be detrimental to an agency's financial future. How do these types of situations happen? Typically, system damage or failure is attributed to one of two reasons.

The first reason for system failure is Operator error. Although District facilities and the transmission systems they control are fully automated with state of the art equipment, the oversight of a trained Operator is essential. When dealing with human beings, there is always the potential for mistakes. In most cases though, Operator error is extremely rare.

The second and more common reason for sewer system issues is mechanical failure. This type of failure is typically the result of aging infrastructure, malfunctioning equipment, or environmental impacts on the infrastructure, such as an earthquake. Instances like this are unforeseen and out of an agency's control. The Regional Board's enforcement actions for requirement violations are applied to both reasons equally.

Now that the Regional Board's potential for exacting an increased level of fines for violating regulations is a reality, there is an apparent need to establish a Sewer Reserve Fund in the event of system damage or failure. TCWD is currently assessing the state of its sewer sanitary system in order to determine the necessity and level of this Reserve Fund.

COURTESY PHONE CALLS

As a courtesy, TCWD would like to remind you to pay attention to the due date on your monthly utility bill, which is printed on the upper right hand corner. If payment is received the day after the printed due date, a 10% penalty will be applied. Should you have a balance which is Past Due from your previous month's utility

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bill, there is a message printed at the bottom of the bill which states the ***Past Due*** date. It is important to note, this amount is needed to avoid a disconnection of service.

TCWD will continue to provide a courtesy call if your Past Due balance is not received in our office one day prior to the scheduled service disconnection date. Also, please update your contact information with TCWD's Customer Service Department to ensure that we can reach you in the event this occurs.

LOCAL STUDENT RESPONSE

One of the core values of a good water steward is to share water-based information with the public. Many times, this can involve discussions on upcoming District projects, the fragile state of current water supplies, and the importance of water conservation. Sometimes, it can be of a much simpler nature.

Recently, TCWD received an email from a local teacher at Arroyo Vista Charter School in Rancho Santa Margarita. She shared an experience about teaching the hydrological cycle to her class. One of the tools she found useful in the development of her lessons was the *Links page* on TCWD's website. Also, she commented how her students scoured the internet and learned a great deal about the different steps of the water cycle. Keep up the good work everyone!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

The Regular Board of Directors Meeting is held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the District's office located at 32003 Dove Canyon Drive, Trabuco Canyon. The public is encouraged to attend.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The Board Meeting was held on August 17, 2011, and the following items are highlights from the Meeting:

- Adoption of Resolution No. 2011-1160 Fixing the Employers Contribution Under the Public Employees' Medical and Hospital Care Act
- Adoption of Resolution No. 2011-1161 Appointing an Interim District Treasurer
- Discussion Regarding the Fines Imposed by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board on Santa Margarita Water District Relating to the 2010 Sewage Spill

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